Sufi AassuRam – A Forgotten Poet (Short Biography)

By: Aakash Asswani

The article was originally published in 'Sindhi language' in Awami Awaz Sunday Magazine dated: 15 March 2015, Sindh, Pakistan. Link: https://archive.org/details/sufi-aasuram-hik-wisaryal-shair
Errors in this translation may be omitted.
[Note: this article was written 9 years ago. The writer has conducted more research on the topic, which will be published soon]

In the land of Sindh, there has never been a shortage of mystics, intellectuals, Sufis, enlightened souls, and poets. Many types of poets have existed. As long as beauty, love, and excellence exist in the world, the field of poetry will remain vibrant. Sindh has always been a cradle of poetry, culture, knowledge, literature, and mysticism. In this vast, unending ocean of Sindh, invaluable pearls are continuously being discovered, illuminating the world of knowledge and literature even more. Among these radiant and enchanting pearls, the name of the great Sufi mystic and poet, Sufi Faqir Master Asuram Sahib, stands out prominently.

Birth and Name: Near Taluka Hala in the Matiari district (Sindh, Pakistan) lies the village of Old Hala, where the family of Sain Daandu Mal used to live. Sain Dando Mal was of the Brahm Khatri by caste (and Hargun as sub-caste). He had two virtuous and pious sons: the elder was Sain Ramchand Sahib, the younger was Sain Aassu Mal Sahib. Sain Aassu Mal, son of Sain Dandu Mal, was born on 21 Assu 1910 in the Vikram Samvat calendar, corresponding to 1854 AD. Some writers and researchers mistakenly recorded his birth year as 1824 AD, but it is completely incorrect. His original name was Aassu Mal, but after receiving his pension and adopting an ascetic attire, he was called Sufi AassuRam or Sadhu AassuRam. He used to write his name everywhere along with his father's name as 'Aassu Mal Dandu Mal Faqir Sufi'.

Childhood and Education: From a young age, Sain AassuRam exhibited an ascetic temperament and often stayed in the company of ascetics and saints. In his neighborhood lived Syed Faqeer Ali Shah, a renowned and God-fearing sage. Despite being visually impaired, he was a skilled hakim (physician), pulse diagnostician, and possessed a saintly disposition. Faqeer Ali Shah was constantly surrounded by patients, and many young individuals would come to him to learn about medicine and the preparation of herbal remedies. Sain AassuRam, during his childhood and school years, frequented visited Syed Faqeer Ali Shah to learn pulse diagnosis and medicine. Additionally, he was enrolled in an educational institute to gain knowledge of religious scriptures. When he was 12 years old, he was captured by virtual love, from which his family freed him, guiding him back to the right path. By the time he reached adulthood at 18, he had gained a considerable understanding of not only Hinduism but also other religions, having studied the Quran, the Bible, and numerous other religious and secular texts. Apart from that, he had a profound grasp of Arabic and Persian. At the age of 17, in the year 1927 Vikram Samvat, equivalent to 1871 AD, he passed the Sindhi Vernacular Final Examination and enrolled in Teachers'

Training College in Hyderabad, Sindh. Successfully completing the three-year course, he obtained his teaching certificate in 1874 AD.

Marriage and Children: During his youth, a marriage was arranged for him within the Brahm Khatri community. From this marriage, he had a son named Versi Mal and two daughters.

Employment: After passing the training course, he was appointed as an Assistant Teacher and posted in the village of Phaka, Taluka Johi, District Larkana, Sindh. He was later transferred to Johi. Following this, he was promoted to Headmaster. After working in various cities, he was eventually transferred back to his birthplace, Old Hala, as a Headmaster. He retired from this position at the age of 55 in Vikram Samvat 1965 (1909 AD).

Inclination towards true love: When Sain AassuRam was young, he used to attend Syed Faqeer Ali Shah, and from there he got the early influence of Sufism and Oneness. During his teaching tenure in Nasarpur, he found significant inspiration and peace through the company of Syed Misri Shah Rizvi, which also nurtured his love for poetry. Afterward, he became acquainted with Jhok Shareef, which deepened his spiritual journey. Meeting the Sufi saints of Jhok Shareef, his inner confusions dissipated, and he transformed into a true Sufi, remaining steadfast to the Jhok Shareef until the end. His love and devotion towards Jhok Shareef and its Saint are evident in his poetry, as illustrated by this verse:

Sada – Sur Sorath

"Thal: Jaate Jhook dhani jhoonjhar, Adiyoon
Meeranpur halbo.

1. Sutalan khe saday daat diye tho, ehro aahy daataar,. Adiyoon paand pukhto jhalbo.
2. Sindh saari khe faiz san waasyo, neehn sando nirwaar. Adiyoon Ghaazi jo ghalbo.
3. Sabh kehn zaat khe taat Allah ji, kaiyai atta israar. Adiyoon sur keean salbo.
4. Jy na wasihean taan kar ziarat, fuqra jo deedaar. Adiyoon kadhi dil man dalbo.
5. Nalaaiq khe noori nawazyo, "Aassu" manganhaar.
   Purt hi utaan palbo."

***

At the courtyard of Jhok Shareef, there used to be a gathering place of his name (Bari ٻارِي) where he used to sing devotional songs with his followers during the festivals, which was demolished after his passing. Being a Sufi, he also used to celebrate the 17th of Hazrat Shah Inayatullah Shaheed, which is still celebrated today by his descendants, with his great-grandson Lekhraj Mal (of Hala, Sindh) continuing the tradition of this celebration.

In his quest for the Truth, he became extremely eager to find a perfect guide, but he couldn't find a complete spiritual guru (Murshid) to settle his seeking soul. According to his written "Janam Saakhi Shabd," he found his spiritual guide (Murshid) at the age of twenty-two. However, according to the historian of “Sindhi Brahm Khatrian jo Dharmak aen Samajhak Ithas”, Moroo Mal Dhandha, Sufi AassuRam found his spiritual guru (Murshid) while he was a teacher in the village of Phaka in Johi.

Additionally, according to research by Sufi AassuRam's great-grandson Thanwar Das, his spiritual guru (Murshid) was Noor Muhammad Shah of Tando Muhammad Khan. Given certain circumstances, it also seems possible that his spiritual guru (Murshid) could have been Noor Muhammad Shah, the brother of Peer Abdul Sattar Shah (awal), the sixth head of the Jhok Shareef shrine. Although accurate information about the exact identity of his spiritual guru (Murshid) remains unclear, it is certainly true that his spiritual guru (Murshid) was named Noor Muhammad Shah, as reflected in some of his poetry, which is expressed in the following manner:

Aarti

“Thal: Aarti karoon alakh Niranjan, jisne jagat upaaya khel banaya.

1. Avtaari toony paighambar thya, jhagh magh jot jagaya raas rachaya.
2. Abdul Qadir Shah Jeelani, qadir qudrat aaya noor laya.
3. Abdul Malik Sain sach parghataya, nobat neenhn bajaya alakh likhaya.
4. Shah Inayat Sufi Sahib, sher shahadat pahaya bharam mitaya.
5. “Noor Muhammad Shah (rh.)” satguru milya, daftar duyi jalaya shabd sunaya.
6. Sarwa sadhan santan bhagtan noon, “Aassu’a” neech nimaya aap samaya.”

***

Kaafi

“Thal: Kaati ishq adol, asaandi gum gumraahi.

1. Ishq bina sabh koora mazkoor, Karanda ishq kalool, Ghati vich beparwahi.
2. Ishq wahdat da baab parhaya,
Maare manada makhol,
Satte sar pur sarwahi.
3. “Noor Muhammad Shah” murshid milya,
Shabd ditayin sabol,
Utayoon moonsan thi hamrahi.
4. Inayatullah “Aassu” sufi,
Kaya wast bol,
Inayat raaz Elahi.”

***

Alongside teaching, he performed the duty of the beloved, the God, as he had a deep connection with the Creator. Sufi AassuRam would also hold a monthly gathering on the 11th of each month to honor the

memory of Ghaus-e-Azam Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jeelani. During these gatherings, his followers and devout Sufi devotees would recite his poetry in the evenings, followed by a communal meal. Both his disciples and the ordinary people would attend these gatherings, which he continued to organize until his passing. However, about 20 or 21 years after his death, this practice ceased as most of his descendants migrated to India. Nevertheless, some of his family members still uphold this tradition.

After retiring, he dedicated his time to remembering the Creator. According to the practice, he would always wake up around ¾ of the night, perform ablution, and engage in the remembrance/worship of the God, spending the entire night in meditation and prayer. In true love, he began to praise the attributes of the Creator through poetry, composing various verses including ghazals, qasidas, and other forms of Sufi poetry.

Beginning of Poetry: The Sufi had a great inclination towards poetry, and from a young age, he used to compose verses. However, his passion increased even more after coming into the company of Syed Misri Shah. He compiled his own poetry into three separate collections, each with its own title:
1. Deewan-e-Aassu: This collection contains only ghazals and a few other forms of poetry.
2. Weraag Namoo, also known as Prem Gunchah: This volume includes hymns, devotional songs, elegies, couplets, and various other forms of poetry.
3. Rissalo Aassu Mal Sufi: This contains couplets and some elegies. Besides these three collections, Sufi Asuram's poetry also includes other works that have been recited.

Among these three books, Deewan-e-Aassu was printed in the year of his passing by the bookseller Verrhu Mal Khatan Mal from Larkana, who was a disciple of Bhagat Teunram. The printed Deewan-e-Aassu contains many noticeable errors. In addition, Sufi AassuRam's other works, including Weraag Namoo (also known as Prem Gunchah) and Rissalo Aassu Mal Sufi, remain unpublished. I (Aakash) have painstakingly collected all of Sufi Asuram's published and unpublished poetry, so that it can be revised, refined, and republished in a new arrangement. This will allow devotees and the general public to benefit from it. Sufi Asuram composed poetry not only in Sindhi, Hindi, and Seraiki but also in other languages, including a few verses in Persian and Arabic. His entire body of work is predominantly infused with the essence of Sufism. The influence of Sufi AassuRam's poetry is also evident in the works of Bhagat Teunram.

Sufi Asuram had the entire Deewan-e-Hafiz memorized and possessed many other books, including the Holy Quran. He had written the Holy Quran himself, and it is still preserved with great respect.

Disciples, Followers, and Bhagat Teunram: Sufi Faqeer Sain AassuRam had disciples in Tando Adam, Hyderabad, Kashmore, and the Kheerthar region. Additionally, his disciples had also moved to India after the partition, settling mostly in Ajmer and other cities. Among his disciples was a notable follower, Bhagat Teunram (1887-1942). Bhagat Teunram originally hailed from the town of Khandu, Taluka Hala New (Sindh), but after obtaining permission from his spiritual teacher Swami AassuRam, he traveled extensively with a group, ultimately settling in Tando Adam. There, he observed the scenic beauty and settled Amrapur Darbar, where he faced numerous difficulties but overcame them and succeeded. Every year, he would hold a gathering and fair at his spiritual abode on the 12th of the Sindhi month of Chait.

Bhagat Teunram was also an accomplished poet, with his poetry published in both Sindhi and Hindi. Sufi AassuRam gave him spiritual initiation "Ubadish" in this manner:

When Sufi AassuRam was appointed as a teacher in Khandu, Bhagat Teunram was about 13 or 14 years old at that time. Bhagat Teunram's father, Bhagat Chella Ram, was himself a devoted servant of Sufis, dervishes, and saints. Bhagat Chella Ram would hold a daily satsang (spiritual gathering) at his place. Sufi AassuRam, having heard about this gathering, went to Bhagat Chella Ram's place. Bhagat Chelaram welcomed him warmly and offered him excellent hospitality. During his visit, Sufi AassuRm conducted the satsang with great enthusiasm and joy. Impressed by Sufi AassuRam's love and insightful discourse, Bhagat Chella Ram requested him to come daily and share his sweet words, as it brought immense peace to him and the other participants in the satsang. Sufi AassuRam agreed to this request and would come daily to conduct the gathering at Bhagat Chella Ram's place, where Bhagat Teunram used to listen with great interest and attention.

One night, during the gathering, Sufi AassuRam narrated a story about the Spiritual guru (Murshid) and said that, without a True Leader (Satguru), the soul cannot achieve its ultimate good. He emphasized that having faith and devotion towards the Satguru is essential. The Satguru should be both a profound scholar of scriptures and someone who has deep spiritual insight. In the company of such a Spiritual guru (Murshid), the thirst of the seeker is quickly quenched. Sufi AassuRam clarified this point in his discourse after singing his poetry. The entire sangat listened attentively, and the next day, following the tradition, they took initiation (Guru Mantra) from Swami AassuRam, thereby accepting him as their true leader. Bhagat Teunram's mother, Mata Krishna, and father, Bhagat Chella Ram, were very pleased. Swami Aassu Ram also continued to come daily to conduct the gatherings, even after fulfilling his school duties.

Bhagat Teeon Ram devotedly and wholeheartedly served saints, holy men, guests, and travelers, and used any spare time to study the Name in solitude, whether in the garden, by the riverbank, or in the graveyard.

Here is a story that illustrates Bhagat Teunram's love, trust, and devotion towards his Spiritual guru (Murshid). As mentioned earlier, Bhagat Teeon Ram used to hold a Satsang fair on the 12th of Chait every year. During one such fair, Sufi AassuRam was present and asked Bhagat Teunram to send someone to fetch their sandals, as they were about to leave. Bhagat Teunram immediately went to retrieve the sandals and placed them at his Satguru's feet. When Sufi Asuram questioned why he had personally brought them instead of sending someone else, Bhagat Teunram replied, "Sain, am I not your servant?" Hearing this, Sufi AassuRam was deeply pleased and smiled, saying that thousands of devotees would serve him in this way. This, he said, is what true devotion and discipleship mean. The entire gathering was astonished by this event and began to celebrate. Here are some of the words of Sant Gurmukh Das (devotee of Sant Teunram) said about his Satguru, Sufi AassuRam:

Thal: Swaami AassuRam avtaari tha, Mera
dada guru daataari tha.

1. Nagar Halan Puranon ka waasi guru, Vadiya vidya ka wohi tha raasi guru, Headmaster thy parhy shastra thy, Who tou aqalmand aachaari tha.
2. Brahm vidya ka satguru sagar tha,
   Bhajan waani banane ka nagar tha,
   Sikhaai bani gaye, gun khani gaye,

Woh tou kawiyon mein kawi bhari
tha.

3. Satguru Teunram par kirpa kar gaye guru,
   Hath himmat ka sar par tou dhaar gaye guru,
   Aisi kirpa kari, bhagti har daya bhari,
   Woh tou bhagti ka bhandaari tha.
4. Gurmukh sarwa gunon ki tha khani guru,
   Brahmgiyani tha who, brahmdhiyani guru,
   Brahm giyan diya, brahm dhiyan diya, Who
   tou puran brahm wichaari tha.

***

Besides Bhagat Teunram, there was another devotee named Mai Bhoji. She would come to his gatherings, assemblies, and later to his fairs, singing his hymns. It is said that Mai Bhoji was tall in stature and well-built, but there is no information about her original place of residence.

Hikmat: Sufi AassuRam had a deep commitment to alleviating the suffering and pain of the poor, the distressed, and the sick. He had received his medical education from Syed Faqeer Ali Shah.
Consequently, it is said that in 1914, he established his own separate clinic. People began to gather at his clinic, and he would provide both prayers and medicine to the patients. He did not charge any fee for the medicine or any other form of compensation. He would not only give medicine but also write prescriptions for those who needed them, so they could benefit from his treatments. His hands were blessed with the grace of the Divine, bringing effective healing. In this context, he also trained his one student, who was his grandson, Bhagat Odhab Das. After Sufi AassuRam's passing, Bhagat Hakeem Odhab Das continued to run the clinic. He also trained his own student, Hakeem Lekhraj Mal, who now manages the clinic and has his own students, who are: 1. Sargwasi Hakeem Chandoo Mal: After learning medical knowledge from his brother, he established his own clinic in Khanoth. 2. Hakeem Paroo Mal: Also, after receiving knowledge from his brother, he opened his own clinic in Hala New. 3. Hakeem Kheemchand: He established his own clinic in Hala New after learning the medical knowledge from his father. Hakeem Lekhraj Mal's students are also continuing to train new students. Sufi AassuRam had also preserved some medical prescriptions in a small manuscript. These prescriptions are mostly written in Persian, with only one or two in Sindhi. The condition of this small manuscript has deteriorated significantly, and not a single page is in a readable state. This manuscript is also kept safely by Hakeem Lekhraj Mal.

Personality and Attire: Sufi AassuRam always had a humble and ascetic nature. He was tall in stature, with long hair reaching his shoulders and a well-groomed beard that followed the Sunnah. His attire consistently consisted of a Gerru Turban, a long shirt, with his waist always covered (Shalwar) with a cloth of Khadhi. He always carried a stick and would engage in nightly worship, staying awake to perform his devotions.

Contemporaries: Among the contemporaries of Sufi AassuRam, notable figures include Syed Faqeer Ali

Shah (Hala Old), Faqeer Miskeen Shah Syed (Khanoth, Taluka Hala New), Syed Misri Shah Rizvi (Nasarpur), and Syed Saman Shah Sarkar. He had significant interactions and spiritual companionship with these individuals. Syed Misri Shah and Syed Saman Sarkar would also visit him in Hala Old. Syed Misri Shah was also a contemporary poet. Additionally, Faqeer Nawab Wali Muhammad Khan Laghari (Tajpur) and Syed Rakhyal Shah (Fatehpur, Balochistan) can also be mentioned as poets of the same era and his contemporaries.

Passing: The great poet, teacher, ascetic, and skilled healer, Sufi Faqeer AassuRam, left this mortal world at the age of 87. On Saturday morning, at around 7:15 a.m. on 18 Mangh 1997 Vikrmi Samvat, which corresponds to 15 February 1941 A.D., passed away and reunited with his Creator. According to Hindu customs, his followers cremated his body. The next day, they came to collect his relics, specifically his bones. Remarkably, the bones of his hands showed clear hairs, as the Sufi had mentioned to his descendants a few days before his passing: "After my cremation, the hairs on my hands will not burn, so keep them safe." In accordance with his will, these hand bones were buried at the site of his place of worship, and a Samadhi (memorial) was constructed over them. After approximately 10 to 12 years, the Samadhi was dismantled and the relics were collected. As India and Pakistan had become separate countries and most of the Sufi's descendants had moved to India, the relics were sent to India. Hakeem Lekhraj Mal (the Sufi's great-grandson) kept them for a time before sending them to his cousin, Hari Ram, who then took them to Nagpur. There, Bhagat Hari Ram buried the relics and established a memorial in their honor.

Items Used by Sufi Asuram During His Lifetime: After Sufi Asuram's passing, various items that were used by him were preserved. These included a musical instrument (Yaktaro), a water pot (Kittli), a pestle (Kundri), a mortar (Kashto), a stick (Lakun), and a wolf's skin (Bagher's skin) on which he used to sit for worship. These items were placed in front of the Samadhi at his place of worship. However, due to severe conditions about 25/30 years ago, many of these items were abandoned in the River Shah, but some still remain. Among them, Sufi AsssuRam's cot, the sandals (Peran jun Chakhryun), and a stick are preserved at his memorial in Nagpur, India. Additionally, some other sticks of Sufi AassuRam are kept by Thanwar Das (a great-grandson) in Mirpur Khas. The prayer beads (Tasbeeh) and a handwritten Quran by Sufi AassuRam are preserved in the home of his great-grandson Chandoo Mal. Another greatgrandson, Hakim Lekhraj Mal, has preserved the feet rests of the cot that Sufi AassuRam used for worship.

Descendants of Versi Mal: Sufi AassuRam had two daughters and one son named Versi Mal. Versi Mal had three daughters and four sons, whose names and details are as follows: 1. Gulab Rai: He was born and died in Hala Old. His entire family moved to India, except for two sons who remained in Sindh. One son, Thanwardas, settled in Mirpur Khas with his family, while the other, Kheman Das, is working in Karachi. 2. Odhab Das: He was born in Hala Old but passed away in India. He had one daughter. 3. Kodan Mal: He was born and died in Hala Old. He had four sons, who have since relocated to Hala New. 4. Kundo Mal: He was born in Hala Old and moved to India, where he passed away. He had five sons, all of whom reside in India. The descendants of Sufi AassuRam refer to themselves as Asswani.

Seat of Authority (Gaadi): After the passing of Sufi AassuRam, his seat of authority was taken over by his grandson, Bhagat Odhab Das. Bhagat Odhab Das later moved to India and entrusted the seat and related items to his disciple and nephew, Hakeem Lekhraj Mal, son of Kodan Mal. Due to certain circumstances, Hakeem Lekhraj Mal did not assume the seat, so it was eventually handed over to his cousin, Bhagat Hari Ram, son of Gulab Rai. Bhagat Hari Ram moved the seat and items to India and established Sufi AassuRam's memorial there in Nagpur city. After the passing of Bhagat Hari Ram, the current custodian of the seat is Mukesh Kumar, who manages Sufi AassuRam's memorial in India.

Annual Fair: After the passing of Sufi Faqeer Aassuram, his annual fair was held with great pomp in Hala Old for several years. However, following the partition of India and Pakistan, the fair is now celebrated every year on 18th Mangh at Nagpur, India, at his memorial. This event attracts his disciples, devotees, and the ordinary people, who come to seek spiritual solace. Additionally, Sufi Asuram's devotee, Mai Bhoji, and her family, including her grandson Daryano Mal, used to hold a similar fair in Ajmer Sharif, India, where they resided. Currently, Sufi AassuRam's other descendants continue to organize gatherings and celebrations in their homes.

Anecdote: It is said that once a woman came to Sufi AassuRam seeking a talisman for having children. After much insistence from the woman, he wrote her a talisman. A year later, a relative of that woman visited Sufi Asuram and reported that the woman had received the blessing of a child from the talisman. The visitor then requested a talisman for himself, hoping to receive similar blessings. Sufi AassuRam retrieved the talisman he had given earlier and showed it to the visitor. The inscription read: "Whether the Creater grants offspring or not, the person is guilt-free." (A similar incident is also recorded in the life of Syed Masri Shah of Nasarpur.)

As an example of his poetic works, his written verses of the Janam Sakhi (a spiritual text) are provided below:

Janam Saakhi Shabd

Karam kare aayo raaj jo raanu
Banyo bagheecho bhuto hee bhaanu 1.
Surk sikan ji maau pyariyam
Tanjan muhobbat manjh tanjayam
Milyo peenghy mein ko dukh jo olaanu

2. Atheen warihiyan mein thyas satsang bherro
Kirya karam aen shastra nerro
Hosh unahi veer mein ho jo baranu

3. Barheen warihiyan mein thyo ishq majazi,
Khojan lagus bany kean baazi
Soor sareer mein ho jo samanu

4. Ararheen warihiyan mein Anjeel parhyam
Fahm san Furqan jo mat soojhyam

Lok ninda jo khanyam sira ty halanu

5. Weeheen warihiyan mein sabh dharm sunjatam
   Satguru dhoondhan jo jaanh jaatam
   Dilri aasayin man ho nimaanu
6. Baaweeheen warihiyan mein achi satguru milyo
   Bhag nidur jo nirmal khulyo
   Wara jy milan kaar huvas vegaanu
7. Panjweeheen warihiyan mein Sufi sahib Ghair kadhi chit'a man kayaeen ghaib
   Sur ty shabd jo thiyo man mein malanu
8. Teehan warihiyan khan aafat tari, Jogh abhiyasi chust chitaari
   Dost dikhayaeen dil mein dhaghanu
9. Chaaleehan warihiyan khan parghat theearas,
   Waswaso wahm weyaras
   Mana thir warto hik handh mein tikaanu
10. "Aassu" chawe wekhan sajan saagyo
    Deepak jout jo dil mein jaagyo
    Janam maran jo waro bhero bhalaanu

***

Khadim-ul-Fuqra
Aakash Asswani
0336-2838913